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Jonny Boy Cookies Event Campaign Targeting College Students

An Honors Thesis Proposal submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
Honors in the Marketing Department

By

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Under the mentorship of Ms. Kristen Ruhland

Abstract

The evaluation of data from social media sites can offer valuable decision-making data for small businesses. Generally, college students are dependent on the Internet and social media sites precisely to connect with others socially. Can small businesses with limited finances and limited technical knowledge compete in this new social media-driven market to develop more in-person events? This paper discusses a detailed event campaign for Jonny Boy Cookies to expand their college student demographic beyond their current middle-aged women demographic. Quantitative approaches will be used to guide the research and implementation of new methods.

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I. Background

Jonny Boy Cookies, a locally owned cookie business in Statesboro, was created by a young couple, Jonny and Hannah. It all started when Jonny began to make his treats for his position as a Sales Representative. One of Jonny's first flavor sets included their well-known Maple Bacon Bourbon cookie. Individuals became more interested in what Jonny had for treats beyond the initial items he presented. After receiving two large orders, Jonny had a realization that he enjoyed being his own boss and this could turn into his full-time job. Close family loaned the young couple money so they could then open their food truck. The food truck appeared mainly at festivals and events in the Statesboro area. A year and a half later, they opened their brick-and-mortar storefront on South Main Street.

Jonny Boy cookies currently have a business goal of expanding through franchising their food truck, which would require outside funding which Jonny and Hannah are currently seeking. Alongside this goal, they are working on developing a wholesale product, which they have struggled with in the past due to packaging, food services, or other opportunities for selling the dough itself. Currently, the company has decided to work with food service companies in Milledgeville to analyze whether selling cookies wholesale or selling the dough itself is a better business opportunity for the small business. Once they accomplish franchising their food truck, the business would require an increase in

dough production due to franchisees now requiring the purchase of dough directly. With wholesale purchases and franchising their food truck being the main priorities, a strategy that the small business wants to use to generate more interest is to attract more consumers to their website.

Due to both Jonny and Hannah's previous work experience primarily being in the medical field, they lacked the more traditional business knowledge that would have been obtained if they had a business degree. Owning a small business requires unlimited time and sufficient funding. Jonny and Hannah both were raised in families that owned small businesses, but none were in the food industry. At the opening of their storefront, the couple understood that taking things slowly was appropriate, while at the same time they were trying to start a family. When weighing the requirements of both priorities, the financial aspect played an important role in decision making. Jonny Boy Cookies contacted the Business Innovation Group in Downtown Statesboro to work with students on a Consulting project. Suzanne Hallman, the Assistant Director of Entrepreneurship Education, reached out to me via email to see my interest in working with one of Statesboro's small businesses. This immediately led to contacting Maret Backhaus, a fellow student in Honors Research Seminar, to see if she was interested in working with the company together. Previously in our Research Seminar course, we shared the same major and minor, yet we were both interested in looking at different areas of social media engagement for small businesses. One effective skill that came from working with another person on the same small

business was allowing us to aid each other. Maret and I met with Jonny Boy Cookies to discuss the project further. We developed an understanding of the needs of the company, Jonny Boy Cookies' objectives for the marketing plan, and discussed ways in which we could assist. After this meeting it was discovered that Jonny Boy Cookies' social media presence was the area lacking the most attention, leading to a restriction in expanding their current target market.

Jonny Boy Cookies has great potential as a small business; therefore, it is important to recognize the target market for the area in which they serve. There are multiple target markets seen within the Statesboro community, with over 50% being college students on and off-campus, as well as middle-aged women. Currently, Jonny Boy Cookies is primarily targeting middle-aged women who live in the Statesboro area. However, in order to expand the businesses and compete in a competitive market, Jonny Boy Cookies recognizes they must expand their target market focus to include the college students that live in the area, while also strengthening the promotion to their current demographic. Maret decided to study the analytics of prior social media posts on Facebook and Instagram while I studied the college student market and the strategies to increase Jonny Boy Cookies' online and in-person engagement. The focus of this project is to answer the question: How will social media and event planning play a role in expanding their current target market?

After meeting with Jonny and Hannah, they both agreed that they lacked knowledge of the current social media trends and what attracts certain target markets. As of March 31st, Big Boy Cookies rebranded to Jonny Boy Cookies. There were legal logistics that surrounded the company name “Big Boy Cookies” that does not serve the same target market. Changing their logo colors and name gave them the opportunity to attract a new target market. They have been working closely with Pioneer Designs in Downtown Statesboro to truly bring their logo to life. The company reviewed mood boards in order to gather a feel for color schemes and fonts, with the intention of restructuring their branding presence. Jonny Boy Cookies’ goal was to keep the same logo but brighten the design with more colors. Product branding and customer relationships are two business areas that can be affected positively or negatively by the way organizations choose to participate in the conversations (Ramsay, 2010). Brand loyalty begins when customers have built up trust in the brand, which companies then try to establish these relationships with customers. That is only the first step. Businesses have more access to information about people, their behavior, and their motivations than ever before. It is essential to understand your key segments and to build intentional relationships accordingly.

Effective marketing tactics are more crucial than ever when creating an event campaign. Understanding a specific audience group to focus on helps set a brand tone that resonates. This will then strengthen the business’s social media branding efforts. When you market to an identifiable target audience, you can

develop messaging that allows individuals to focus on those likely to purchase the product. By concentrating resources on a particular customer segment, a small business may be able to improve its service to a smaller segment of the market than its larger competitors. Jonny Boy Cookies assigned me to create an event campaign that will better reach their new audience. Completing this will provide answers to several questions about the relationship between the business and its web target market.

The focus of this thesis is to develop events that can be implemented by the small business in a specific timeline. This will include a brief description of the event, as well as the reasoning and benefits that this campaign could achieve with the right resources. Research was conducted to further understand how small businesses use social media and their current knowledge of the platforms. All the research conducted would be helpful in understanding what can be done to create at least four events and two partnerships to increase their presence. This business has a foundation to build upon and given the right information, they can be successful at reaching their new target market. Jonny and Hannah had valid concerns through our last few meetings about events that could fail completely or only work partially. The main emphasis of this project is to try and step outside of comfort zones and determine what can be done better.

II. Secondary Research / Literature Review

This literature review will discuss the importance of media engagement and event campaigns in small businesses with existing competition. The closeness between small business customers and managers can provide the impetus for innovation due to the ease with which these managers can identify unmet customer needs (Hausman, 2004). *Creating unique and differentiated 'customer experiences' linked with a 'personal connection' is more crucial than ever.* In competitive markets, those who continually seek to comprehend and then solve customer problems are the ones who prevail.

Competition

Hannah aspires to be the Ben & Jerry's of the Cookie World. To make this a reality, Jonny Boy Cookie uses the highest quality ingredients to produce high-quality cookies. Jonny Boy Cookies customers have expressed they would pay more for a superior quality product. This led to the main focus on delivering their cookies at premium quality for their customers.

Insomnia Cookies, a competitor in Statesboro, mass produces their cookies which equates to significant price breaks. Jonny Boy Cookies has recently started using a cookie depositor that has a higher volume, but most recipes are still hand-scooped and made in small batches. Jonny Boy Cookies currently has a business model of offering price breaks with the purchase of up to four dozen cookies. Due

to their emphasis on high-quality cookies, they cannot compete with the price breaks of Insomnia Cookies.

Lack of social media presence has hindered their business, mainly driven by content production and lack of familiarity with the latest trends. Digital platforms have grown as a dominant model to organize markets among users and producers of a variety of products and services ([McIntyre and Srinivasan, 2017](#); [Reuver et al., 2017](#)).

Engagement

Hannah believes that highly interactive posts or videos posted on their platforms tend to generate an increase in engagement both online and in sales. As research has shown social media engagement mediates social media usage and communication behavior ([Paek, Hove, Jung, & Cole, 2013](#)). This type of marketing is a quickly expanding trend, as it is a highly efficient tool when engaging with consumers. [Oh, Bellur, and Sundar \(2010\)](#) have defined engagement as “the progression from interacting with the interface physically to becoming cognitively immersed in the content offered by it and then onto proactively spreading the outcomes of this involvement” (p. 25).

Smith and Gallicano believed that for many Millennials engaging with an organization online began as a self-initiated process in which they sought out the

company and assessed the value of engaging with it online based on personal interests (Smith & Gallicano, 2015). Participants often switched between personal and professional social media activities (answering as a student and a company employee). These individuals reported engaging organizations for their own interpersonal relationships. Social media sites, like Instagram and TikTok, are increasingly tailored to meet the needs of specific target markets. This pattern will continue to be amplified in the upcoming future of social media. Understanding the pattern is the key that reveals which social platform college students will continue to utilize most.

III. Discussion

With the goal of looking to truly increase Jonny Boy Cookies' presence in Statesboro, GA, it is evident that it should begin with looking into what connections this small business lacks. The majority of students rely on recommendations from friends over any other form of advertising, according to the *Enrollment Management Report* (Hope, 2017). Events play a crucial role in college life; therefore, connections matter the most to reach this target audience

The first event proposal for Jonny Boy Cookies is 'A Cookie for A College Grad', which would be hosted during the duration of May 9th through May 11th's commencement ceremonies in Statesboro, GA. The purpose of this would be to allow graduates to come in with their cap and gown on to redeem a free cookie of

their choice between the hours of 9:00 am - 5:30 pm each day. An event like this would generate student and family traffic that could be interested in purchasing items like a gift basket for their graduate(s) that are available in store. This event could be limited to one day, although a multi-day event would allow opportunities for a manageable amount of traffic into the store each day.

Thinking forward to August and September, events, such as a 'Back to School' night in August and a "Pajama Party" in September is the perfect time to engage with students that could be familiar with or new to the area. Events similar to these can make a difference in a student's day or attitude, as they could be far from home, or struggling to adapt to a new environment. The goal of these two events is to allow a small period of time that students can come to mingle with one another while treating their sweet tooth.

Trivia night is another amazing opportunity for Jonny Boy Cookies to incorporate user-generated content on one of their platforms to engage with their new target audience. Online Trivia can be difficult to begin as they would have to rely on word-of-mouth, however, it could be the beginning of an event that can be run in-store with specific reserved times. Although students prefer trivia in person, this would be a chance to reach individuals that could have busier schedules or lack transportation to certain events. This event would ideally be held around 6:00 or 7:00 pm during weekdays. It has been discussed that this event can have a flexible schedule as they begin to incorporate it through lives or

Instagram stories. There is an opportunity for this couple to do planned trivia days, in which they could gather a group of questions to upload onto their Instagram story if they're unable to commit to frequent live events. If Jonny Boy Cookies decided that they would like to host Trivia in-person, then it would be most beneficial for them to partner with a local bar/restaurant to entice their audience to their event.

Partnerships can be essential to establishing a long-lasting relationship with on-campus resources or organizations at Georgia Southern. Jonny Boy Cookies has worked with a few organizations that we have on our Statesboro campus, but we can agree that more effective outreach can be achieved with the correct resources. This small business has been encouraged to continuously reach out to the organizations for percentage nights alongside speaking with George-Anne to promote these events that target our student body. It would be ideal to advertise these events on their social media at least two weeks prior to the first day. The prime time to publish this content would be at either 11 am or 2 pm to reach their target audience. This content can range from main feed posts, stories, lives, or IGTVs. With data that Maret retrieved from Jonny Boy Cookies' Facebook and Instagram platforms, it is concluded that their lives create the most engagement. Attaching hashtags such as, #cookies (31.1M), #sweets (28.2M), #cookiesofinstagram (#2.9M), #baking (34M), #homemade (102M), and many more. are essential to gaining the traction that is needed on their social platforms. Although it is simple to attach hashtags to a post, it is important to recognize that

these should be randomized to accurately reach more individuals as they post more frequently.

The intention is to create a series of coordinated activities within a controlled period of time, and quantitative outcomes will be tracked and measured throughout the project. One important step of this process is creating a discrete and measurable method of analysis that Jonny Boy Cookies could continue to develop beyond my assistance. Based on the data collected, specific social platforms will be best suited for Jonny Boy Cookies to utilize, including Facebook and Instagram. This can be done by developing and implementing this seven-step method, demonstrated in Figure 1, to first identify the net influence wielded by a user in a social network and then to predict that user's ability to generate the viral spread of information, businesses can identify the "right" individuals to engage in social media conversations (Kumar & Rohan Mirchandani, 2012). These seven steps allow Jonny Boy Cookies to follow the right path to determining what works best for them.

SEVEN STEPS TO SOCIAL MEDIA SUCCESS

Our research suggests that by using this seven-step framework to identify and recruit individuals who are influential on social media, businesses can promote social media word of mouth about their product or service.

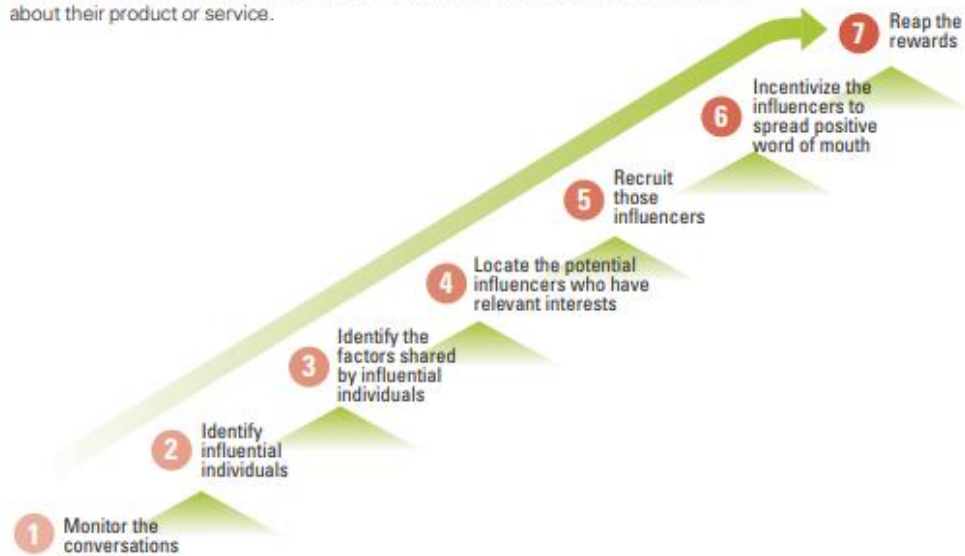


Figure 1. A Seven-Step Framework for Social Media Marketing (Kumar & Rohan Mirchandani, 2012, p. 56)

In the figure above, Step 1 is most beneficial for Jonny Boy Cookies when their business participates in on-campus events, such as Boro Browse. This is a great chance for them to gauge how interested their new audience is and what determines what the business can do to make themselves stand out. The next step focuses on who will help them interact with the individuals that they're trying to reach. This helping hand could be Georgia Southern, as an institution, or the George-Anne, as an organization. Step 3 would be identifying platforms, hashtags, times, and other factors that reach their targeted audience so changes in social media platforms can be adjusted to fit the needs of who they're wanting to attract. The next step can be difficult as Jonny Boy Cookies is competing with Insomnia Cookies in a small town. There is a possibility that Jonny Boy Cookies

can use social media to find who actively references Insomnia Cookies or cookies in general. Steps 5 and 6 coincide with one another, therefore once they find an individual, they'll have the opportunity to work directly with them to spread awareness of their business. The last step is simple, although it is essential to consistently monitor the impact of the influencer and what the business is doing right as well.

IV. Conclusion/Reflective Critique

This thesis project provided Jonny Boy Cookies with a clear campaign that can be implemented and adjusted based on their timeline. This entire project has been a long journey that had many unexpected bumps in the road. Jonny and Hannah have been patient and I could not thank them enough for trusting me to work with them during the duration of my thesis. Truthfully, this project has helped with my confidence and adaptation skills, so I hope to share what I've learned with others.

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